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## **A PLEA FOR REDUCTION OF COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS IN SPANISH**

From the standpoint of many high-school teachers of Spanish the requirements of the college entrance boards are excessive and greatly in need of reform. I refer especially to the fact that the reading of 650 to 1,000 pages, selected from the usual classics, is established as the norm for three years of high-school Spanish in conjunction with ample training in other phases of language study. In actual practice the reading of 450 to 500 pages is a fair average of accomplishment. Many schools frankly admit the impossibility of meeting the requirements of the colleges and have constructed their course of study independently of them. I am of the opinion, however, that greater thoroughness and accuracy which result from a less ambitious program constitute a valid reason for disregarding, to a certain extent, the recommendations of the college entrance boards even though this discrepancy in requirements may work a hardship on those who must submit to formal entrance examination.

Spanish teachers apparently fell heir to the tradition that any language course in order to merit college entrance credits must show a goodly number of pages read, and that these pages must constitute a worthy introduction to the literature of the language. Those of us who work with boys and girls of high-school age know the folly, nay, the impossibility, of expecting them to assimilate several pages daily of idiomatic Spanish in such a way that they can reproduce it, or parse it, or translate it, or do with it whatever our interpretation of the direct method may demand. The colleges have been insistent upon the high schools assuming the burden of the responsibility for conversational practice. But daily drill in the use of the spoken language is accomplished most easily and naturally when it can be based on a small amount of simple text which is not far beyond the scope of the average high-school pupil.

Although the colleges now grant credit on aural training, they have not reduced the reading requirements to allow time for drill in the active use of the language. College entrance examinations for credit in elementary language work presuppose thorough training in at least five kinds of instruction:\*

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\* College Entrance Board, July 1, 1919.

- (1) Ability to translate at sight into idiomatic English.
- (2) Ability to read at sight or hear a passage read and to reproduce it in the foreign language.
- (3) Ability to answer questions on the affairs of every-day life in the language.
- (4) Ability to write from dictation.
- (5) A solid foundation of grammar.

Through the work of the College Entrance Board the requirements are practically the same in most of the Eastern colleges; the outline course of one will serve to illustrate all. The Barnard College Catalogue for 1919-20 furnishes the outline given here.

A student offering two years of high-school Spanish for entrance credit is required to have had during the *first year*:

- (1) Careful drill in pronunciation.
- (2) Drill in the rudiments of grammar.
- (3) Reading and rendering into good English of 100 to 175 pages of easy prose and verse, and the translation into Spanish of easy variations and sentences.
- (4) Exercises containing illustrations of the principles of grammar.
- (5) Writing Spanish from dictation.

*Second year:*

- (1) Reading of 250 to 400 pages of prose and verse.
- (2) Practice in translating Spanish to English and English to Spanish.
- (3) Continued study of grammar.
- (4) Mastery of verb forms.
- (5) Writing of Spanish from dictation.
- (6) Memorizing of easy short poems.

From this it may be noted that the reading requirement for the first two years of high-school Spanish is 350 to 575 pages.

The requirements for intermediate Spanish, *i. e.*, the third year of Spanish, are as follows:

- (1) Reading of 400 to 600 pages of Spanish.
- (2) Constant practice in giving paraphrases, abstracts, and reproductions from memory of passages learned.
- (3) Study of a grammar of moderate completeness.
- (4) Writing from dictation.

Smith College establishes similar requirements for two years of high-school work offered for entrance credit, excepting that 300 pages of prose and poetry are to be covered; the first year's reading to be selected from a carefully graded reader, *Fortuna and Zaragüeta*; the second year's reading selected from the following: *Marianela*, *José*, *El Capitán Veneno*, *Cuentos Alegres*, *La Barraca*, *Becquer*, *Legends and Tales*, etc.

Is it to be wondered that the high schools rebel against such requirements? The impossibility of reading 250 to 400 pages during the second year is at once evident if there is any attempt to build an active vocabulary by reproduction of the text in any of various ingenious ways which our direct-method practices have devised. But such work requires a great deal of time, both for the student's preparation and the class-room recitation.

It goes without saying that the purpose of the extensive reading course is to develop an ability to read easily and profitably in the foreign language. The test of this ability is the "easy sight translation" of the entrance examination, which frequently proves a maze of new words and intricate constructions. I am convinced that "ability to read at sight moderately difficult Spanish prose" is too high an aim for the high-school student with two or even three years of high-school Spanish. Reading at sight to get a vague idea of the content is possible, but reading at sight in order to write a translation in "idiomatic English" is quite a different matter. I have often wondered if the purpose of such an examination would not be served equally well if the student were examined on material that he had read during his high-school course. I see no reason why his ability to translate, reproduce, or parse could not be shown equally well.

In contrast to the outline of the College Entrance Board the courses of study of many high schools show a much lighter assignment. The New York Syllabus for Modern Language, April, 1918, which serves as a guide for many smaller schools, requires the reading of 70 pages during the first year, 155 pages during the second year, 250 pages during the third year, and 225 pages during the fourth year, with an additional 200 pages of outside reading. The choice of texts is liberal, but it is to be noted that the reading for the first year and a half is selected from various readers. In the second half of the second year 80 pages are to be read, and the list includes

Alarcón, El Capitán Veneno, Novelas Cortas, and again several readers.

The suggestion to lessen the reading requirements is not to be interpreted as a desire to make the course easier; it is, on the contrary, an effort to gain time to intensify the work and to insure greater thoroughness, and especially to allow opportunity for the use of the spoken language. We can do little more in two or three, even four years, than lay a foundation and develop a taste for language study. A small amount of work well done will secure better results than the hasty going over of too ambitious a program. In spite of our delusions on the subject only a few of those who begin the study of Spanish in high school will read Spanish literature either as a college assignment or a cultural pursuit. In spite of our arguments about business opportunities, only a few will actually engage in commercial relations with Spanish-speaking countries. Then why the emphasis on the desirability of initiating high-school sophomores to the beauties of Spanish literature or the intricacies of business procedure? I am inclined to think that for the majority their study of Spanish in high school will have about the same value as an equal period devoted to mathematics, history, or science, *i. e.*, the mental discipline and the pleasure of the doing, coupled, let us hope, with a wider interest and a broader understanding of a foreign people. Therefore, whatever the method of instruction or the course of study, let us be sure that it is adapted to high-school boys and girls and designed to give the maximum of training, profit, and pleasure to the greatest number. And even for those who go to college, I feel sure that if they have gone slowly and carefully over a small amount of work in their two or three years study of Spanish in high school, they will have a better foundation upon which to build later a working use of the language, and even to pass the college entrance examinations. If that is true, then let us admit that few schools aim to meet the college requirements, or else print in the college catalogues a requirement that meets the average of high-school accomplishment.

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